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# The Weekly Wrap Up

April 21, 2006

From Viola Miller, Tennessee's Commissioner for  
The Department of Children's Services

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## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Don't Leave Home Without Them

As we continue toward reforming public child welfare in Tennessee, our awareness of the importance of community partnerships becomes increasingly more evident. We cannot do this work alone. DCS lacks the complete array of resources and expertise necessary to work successfully with families. Our families have many basic needs that must be met before they can keep their children safe and nurtured. Many of our children come from homes suffering from poverty, inadequate housing, poor nutritional standards, drug and alcohol addictions. As you well know, the list can go on and on. We do not know enough or have enough to support families in overcoming these

challenges. Community partners can and will work with us to develop responses that will make families stronger.

Public child welfare has not historically reached out to other community service organizations, individuals and groups, faith-based and otherwise. Many of our regions are beginning to hold community forums, bringing people together (usually and wisely with food involved) to ask the question, “How can we work together better to improve the lives of families and children in our community?” The response has been and will continue to be amazing.

One county DCS office reached out, expected maybe 20 people and had 60 individuals show up. I have heard comments from our staff in many areas to the effect that, “We had no idea that we had the wealth of resources in this community represented by the folks who showed up.” Schools, courts, mental and physical health providers, civic groups, faith-based groups, law enforcement (this list can go on and on as well) can and will support our work with families, but we must be willing to reach out to them.

Caring networks in every community can make our jobs much easier and more rewarding. If we don’t want children in that revolving door, in and out of custody, helping families establish natural support networks in their communities is essential.

Think about your own life and the network of family, friends, neighbors, church members who provide the support and encouragement you need in your life. Our families need that same system of support if they are to be strong and keep their children safe and nurtured.

Viola P. Miller

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## DCS WORKS FOR DISASTER VICTIMS TOO

### Staffers Extra Busy During A Brutal Tornado Season

Did you know that every disaster declared, in Tennessee, by the Governor of Tennessee and the President of the United States has an elite team of DCS workers that actually leave their daily jobs and work for those affected by the storms, along side of TEMA and FEMA?

In 2000, the Department was given the responsibility for this task. The Regional Administrators and Central Office staff formed the team with 8 original staff members. Since the beginning this team has worked in disasters across the state of Tennessee from the First Tornadoes in East TN to the Flooding of Shelby County, for a total of 5 disasters. Since that time, 5 of the original team members have left the department and new volunteers have been added.

The team currently consists of: Pat Vasterling, Robin Ryan, Steve Smith, Shayne Davis, Mary Beth Duke, Teddy Reeves, Dana Lowery, Laura Perry, Ayana Chism, and Jerry Wiggins. (I hope I have not missed anyone) Thanks to each of you for your desire to be of service to those in crisis at such a critical time in their lives.

While you go about your daily work, please remember the families and people that will be involved in helping the citizens of Gibson and Dyer Counties Recover from the recent Tornadoes.

Here is what you will find on the TEMA website (<http://www.tnema.org/DA/Default.htm>) about the DCS involvement:

## Community Relations

During disaster operations, the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency has developed a plan to deploy a well-organized team of community relation specialists in order to inform citizens and local leaders of our state about response and recovery programs, informing them how to apply for or obtain disaster-relief services, and to promote realistic expectations. Through the Emergency Services Program (ESC), community relations field workers from the Tennessee Department of Children Services are charged with the responsibility of collecting information about the disaster-stricken area and the affected population in order to help the State-Federal emergency response team provide better services to the affected communities.

For example, Community Relations teams will coordinate with local leaders to determine if there are any concentrations or isolated pockets of damage, and refer specific problems or questions to the disaster field office staff. In general, the Community Relations effort gives visibility to and helps instill public confidence in the combined relief efforts of the State and Federal governments and of voluntary organizations.

Your Disaster April 2006 Team Members for Gibson and Dyer Counties: Tom Hutchison (Central Office Coordinator), David Arrington (Central Office Coordinator), Steve Smith (Northwest), Dana Lowery (Northwest), Jerry Wiggins (Southwest), Laura Perry (Shelby) and Mary Beth Duke (Northwest). The remaining Team members remain on standby in case they are needed.

Mary Beth Duke

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## SACWIS 'R Us

What if we just went to the computer store and bought a SACWIS application for the Department? It's not as far-fetched as it sounds. There are a number of companies that are now offering commercially available software for agencies to use to support case management, and four of them came calling on April 17 and 18: Bearing-Point/Oracle, SAGA Technologies, Curam Software and Harmony Information Systems.

Select staff from all over the state participated in the presentations. While the four demonstrations in March offered examples of custom-built, fully functional SACWIS

applications, this month's product demonstrations gave participants a glimpse of products that are designed as enterprise solutions to provide basic case management functionality right out of the box.

These software packages are designed to be easily installed and to be used 'as is' in order to provide business value faster and cheaper than a custom-built or transferred application.

Thanks again to all of the front-line, facilities and Central Office staff who participated in the presentations. Take a look at the group shot below and see if you recognize your representative on the team!



## The Easter Bunny Comes to the Greene County Office

A couple of weeks ago, Heather & Diana Lee from Lighthouse Assembly of God Church here in Greeneville called the office and asked if their youth group could bring us Easter Baskets for the children in foster care in Greene County.

I was so excited, because I had just mentioned this a week before when we had our Christmas Appreciation Luncheon. They agreed to do 110 Easter Baskets for us. We agreed for them to be delivered to the office on Thursday April 13, at 4:30 pm. I was sure surprised by how much it filled up the conference room.

We joyfully began calling the foster parents for our children and asked them if they could be at the office that day to pick them up. The foster parents were all thrilled that they wouldn't have to go buy them.

This is what community partnerships can do for our children and families. They have agreed to do it again next year. All of the case managers were excited also, as they got many face to face contacts in that day with their children. Heather and Diana mentioned that they were able to get most of the items donated for the baskets.

-- Carolyn S. Taylor

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## MOUNTAIN VIEW YDC 'APPLES FOR THE STUDENTS'

From September 2005 through March 2006, Mountain View staff, their families and friends participated in Food City's Apples For The Students program. Food City first initiated their Apples for the Students program during the 1990-91 school year. It is an easy, cost-effective way for participating schools to receive equipment and tools they need to better serve their students. Throughout the promotion, Food City register receipts are collected in exchange for computers, software, audio/visual and other educational materials. To date, Food City has awarded over \$9.2 million in needed equipment to over 700 participating area schools.

Volunteer Coordinator David Bugg coordinated MVYDC's involvement in the Apples For The Students program. This year, we collected over \$80,500 in Food City register receipts, which qualifies Mountain View to select and receive some needed educational and treatment-oriented equipment. In addition to selecting some recreation equipment, the "big ticket" item we chose is a Canon Mini-DVD camcorder that will be available for use by all departments. Equally important, will be its use in our Journey Pre-Release program, where our students will participate in "mock" interviews to develop and refine job-seeking and employment skills. Thanks to all Mountain View staff, their families and friends who made this a resounding success!

-- Steve Collier



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## MOUNTAIN VIEW YDC HORTICULTURE CLASS MAKES DONATIONS TO AREA AGENCIES

The Horticulture student class at Mountain View YDC recently donated tomato plants and flowering plants grown in our greenhouse to two agencies that provide needed services to the residents of Jefferson County and the surrounding areas.

The donations are part of Mountain View's ongoing community involvement and partnership efforts. On behalf of Mountain View, Accreditation Manager Kathy Ridenour made the plant donations to the Douglas Cherokee "Meals On Wheels" Senior Nutrition program and the Jefferson County Nursing Home.

Jefferson County Nursing Home Director Roger Mynatt said the donated plants would be used in a resident gardening program. We are proud and honored to assist these community agencies that provide valuable services.

-- Steve Collier



Kathy Ridenour (right) presents flowers to

Pat Taylor, Nutrition Director at Douglas Cherokee Senior Nutrition Program.